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ABSTRACT

Articulation between educational institutions should ideally specify exit-level competencies for student passage from one educational level to another, and thus avoid course repetition and facilitate credit acceptance. Unfortunately, this has been successfully effected in only a few instances involving a limited number of programs. Greater progress has been made between community colleges and universities than between comunity colleges and county-level vocational schools. Examples of successful articulation agreements in Florida include a mandate that associate in arts degree transfer students be classified as juniors upon transfer, and a common course numbering system assuring equal credit for community college and university courses. The sole instrument, however, for effecting articulation between school districts and community colleges is the coordinating council. Two case studies, conducted in a quasi-rural and an urban county in Florida to determine the effectiveness of vocational curriculum articulation, revealed: (1) a picture of distrust and competition between the vocational-technical school and community college in the quasi-rural county; and (2) an equal lack of cooperation in the urban county despite a longer history of articulation. Solutions to these problems will require cooperation among administrators, the involvement of college personnel in decision making, and clearer lines of responsibility among state agencies. (HB)

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Indications are that vocational curriculum articulation is proving an elusive goal. Although widely endorsed and the subject of important studies, this elimination of artificial divisions in the educational system has actually been effected only in certain areas throughout the nation.

Recent case studies conducted in Florida -- in many ways a typical state -- indicate that the culprits are poor attitudes and lack of communication. Conservative and turf defense-oriented personnel, concerned with autonomy and security, effectively prevent communication between vocational schools and junior colleges. In one case a new school superintendent in essence killed articulation efforts that had been begun between a county and its community college.

In the ideal articulation model, exit level competencies are envisioned as preparing the student for the next highest level--from vocational school through university. There would be no course repetition. Credit earned at one level would be accepted at another. Advanced placement would be available to students returning in mid-career. Both student and administration would save time, effort and money.

In actuality, this happy situation has been effected only in a few instances and involving specific professions. A successful example is the Agassiz Region Nursing Education Consortium in Minnesota and North Dakota. (See Voc Ed., March, 1982, p. 32). Moreover, nursing education, in many ways a controversial area, has produced a surprising amount of coordination between licensed practical nurse (LPN) and associate degree nursing (ADN) programs nationwide. An LPN graduate is able in many locales to complete a transitional term before entering the second year of the ADN program. However, that student is not able to enter a bachelors in nursing program with advanced standing. ADN graduates are given credit for their nursing courses in a few bachelors of science (BSN) programs.

On the other hand, there is in so many fields a continuation of the problems cited by David S. Bushnell in his famed study of 1978. Bushnell said that the present rate of duplication of effort in vocational education can no longer be afforded.

Much greater progress toward articulation appears to have been made between community colleges and universities than between community colleges and county-level vocational schools. For example, in Florida an articulation agreement mandates that Associate of Arts transfer degrees from community colleges must be accepted by universities and students must be classified as juniors on transfer. A common course numbering system assures equal credit for community college/university courses, and this has been particularly effective in the academic area. In a recent development, the common course numbering system is now being applied to non-college credit vocational programs in Florida. It remains to be seen if this will help solve any problems, since thus far, little coordination has taken place between community college and university occupational programs.

In contrast to the academic apparatus, the sole instrumentality for effecting articulation between school districts and community colleges in Florida is the coordinating council created in community college districts. These councils are charged with long-range planning, but the Florida case studies indicate that few plans have been implemented due primarily to internicene warfare between institutions. However, the councils have been able to control the development of new programs which would duplicate the efforts of existing programs.

The Florida case studies involved quasi-rural and urban counties. A total of 123 interviews were conducted, and 252 questionnaires were received and tabulated. The following factor categories were considered in the study: attitudinal, communication, curricular, demographic, policy, political and resource. Seventy-three subfactors were identified within these categories The goal of the study was to determine to what degree effective vocational curriculum articulation was being practiced at the two sites, and what factors tend to affect that practice.

A unified picture of distrust and competition between vocational-technical school and community college was found at Site A -- a quasi-rural county. Blame was placed on high-level administrators for establishing an adversarial relationship. Instructors did not feel that their suggestions were heard and political expediency rather than student needs was thought to direct administrative decisions.

The only regular contact between middle and upper level management took place at coordinating council meetings. However, these sessions were not usually attended by the superintendent, and it was the consensus that the council was dominated by the college. In essence, no articulation was expected at Site A, and essentially none was found. However, some personal relationships were established between county and community college representatives on the council.

In contrast to the rural county, an urban county (Site B) offered an enigmatic picture so far as articulation was concerned. The facilities were of course much more elaborate, with the county offering 42 programs to 2,000 high school students on one vocational campus, and 20 programs to 800 at a second. The community college offered 30 certificate and 45 associate degree vocational programs. There were four community college campuses, with an enrollment of over 10,000 of which approximately 40 percent were in vocational programs.

In contrast to Site A, the urban site does have a history of attempting articulation. For example, the county and community college initiated an articulated business education program as early as 1973. The 1973 master plan included a design for the articulation of industrial programs as well. Neither portion of the plan was ever implemented, but interest in articulation of metal trades has been reviewed recently.

In addition to such locally sponsored articulation, the requirements of professional organizations, particularly those which accredit programs and certify graduates, have an impact on all phases of program operation. Their regulations tend to standardize programs between institutions and have resulted in articulation in some fields. For example, a registered Medical Laboratory Technician who has worked for two years in the field and has completed all academic requirements, is eligible to take the Medical Laboratory Technology national registry examination. Also, the American Dental Hygiene Association has a movement afoot to require programs to develop a competency-based curriculum which allows for advanced placement. And regulations of the Florida

Cosmetology Licensing Board require that students must be allowed to transfer credit from one accredited school to another.

However, despite all of the above factors, no truly articulated program between vocational school and community college was found at Site B. Again, as at the rural site, lack of articulative success is thought to be due to lack of cooperation between participants. For example, the county superintendent does not attend coordinating council meetings, and considers the council the instrument of the community college. Another factor inhibiting cooperation is a degree of rivalry between the four community college campuses.

The Florida school systems are largely autonomous, with county boards being elected, and community college board members appointed by the governor. Moreover, the coordinating councils were appointed to seek articulation by eliciting cooperation rather than enforcing mandates. However, there seems to be something of a trend toward mandatory requirements. For example, the Florida legislature has ordered common course numbering between the vocational-technical centers and community colleges.

Legislation can mandate reporting and formal planning documents. It can bring attention to problems and withhold revenue from recalcitrant institutions. But in the long view curriculum articulation is a local problem and its implementation requires the acceptance of certain concepts by local educators and administrators.

Coordination of effort between two institutions begins with the willingness on the part of participants to cooperate. Local administrators need to resolve conflicts between themselves before they can begin honest communication and become role models for their subordinates. After administrators have developed trusting relationships and established non-threatening settings, other actors tend to follow suit. These efforts are most likely to begin with informal arrangements. Formal agreements need to be developed before serious articulation begins, however.

Administrators need to involve instructors, advisory council members and guidance counselors in various phases of decision making. Instructors and guidance counselors need to cooperate with each other. Advisory council members need to be included in developing competencies based on industry job requirements. Too often these competencies are arbitrarily tied to existing educational programs rather than industry needs.

Vocational educators need to develop more positive self-images. A related personnel problem is seen in the lack of respect shown vocational faculites in some locales. This causes some faculty members to defend or deny their status. If, for example, community college faculty insist on academic status, they are not likely to negotiate with vocational school faculty on articulation matters.

State departments of education, through changes in regulations, could minimize the effects of competition for full-time teaching equivalent, concern for autonomy, and the paper burden. Agencies sometimes have difficulty getting clear information from departments of education because the divisions of those state agencies do not communicate among themselves. Thus clearer lines of responsibility are needed and such communication must be established.

In summary, there is evidence that duplication of effort by students and institutions is common in vocational education, and both individual and institutional self-interest often prevent the elimination of this duplication. Therefore, if vocational curriculum articulation is to become the norm during the 1980's, attitudes must change and communication must be implemented.

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